Alabanza: In Praise of Local 100
by Martín Espada

for the 43 members of Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Local 100, working at the Windows on the World restaurant, who lost their lives in the attack on the World Trade Center

Alabanza. Praise the cook with the shaven head
and a tattoo on his shoulder that said Oye,
a blue-eyed Puerto Rican with people from Fajardo,
the harbor of pirates centuries ago.
Praise the lighthouse in Fajardo, candle
glimmering white to worship the dark saint of the sea.

Alabanza. Praise the cook's yellow Pirates cap
worn in the name of Roberto Clemente, his plane
that flamed into the ocean loaded with cans for Nicaragua,
for all the mouths chewing the ash of earthquakes.

Alabanza. Praise the kitchen radio, dial clicked
even before the dial on the oven, so that music and Spanish rose before bread. Praise the bread. Alabanza.

Praise Manhattan from a hundred and seven flights up,
like Atlantis glimpsed through the windows of an ancient aquarium.
Praise the great windows where immigrants from the kitchen could squint and almost see their world, hear the chant of nations:
Ecuador, México, Republica Dominicana,
Haiti, Yemen, Ghana, Bangladesh.

Alabanza. Praise the kitchen in the morning,
where the gas burned blue on every stove
and exhaust fans fired their diminutive propellers,
hands cracked eggs with quick thumbs
or sliced open cartons to build an altar of cans.

Alabanza. Praise the busboy's music, the chime-chime
of his dishes and silverware in the tub.

Alabanza. Praise the dish-dog, the dishwasher
who worked that morning because another dishwasher could not stop coughing, or because he needed overtime
to pile the sacks of rice and beans for a family floating away on some Caribbean island plagued by frogs.

Alabanza. Praise the waitress who heard the radio in the kitchen and sang to herself about a man gone. Alabanza.

After the thunder wilder than thunder,
after the booming ice storm of glass from the great windows,
after the radio stopped singing like a tree full of terrified frogs,
after night burst the dam of day and flooded the kitchen,
for a time the stoves glowed in darkness like the lighthouse in Fajardo,
like a cook's soul. Soul I say, even if the dead cannot tell us about the bristles of God's beard because God has no face, soul I say, to name the smoke-beings flung in constellations across the night sky of this city and cities to come. Alabanza I say, even if God has no face.

Alabanza. When the war began, from Manhattan to Kabul two constellations of smoke rose and drifted to each other, mingling in icy air, and one said with an Afghan tongue: Teach me to dance. We have no music here. And the other said with a Spanish tongue: I will teach you. Music is all we have.
Here, Bullet

by Brian Turner,

If a body is what you want,
then here is bone and gristle and flesh.
Here is the clavicle-snapped wish,
the aorta’s opened valves, the leap
thought makes at the synaptic gap.
Here is the adrenaline rush you crave,
that inexorable flight, that insane puncture
into heat and blood. And I dare you to finish
what you’ve started. Because here, Bullet,
here is where I complete the word you bring
hissing through the air, here is where I moan
the barrel’s cold esophagus, triggering
my tongue’s explosives for the rifling I have
inside of me, each twist of the round
spun deeper, because here, Bullet,
here is where the world ends, every time.
Monologue of a Dog Ensnared in History

by Wislawa Szymborska, translated from the Polish by Clare Cavanagh and Stanislaw Baranczak

There are dogs and dogs. I was among the chosen.
I had good papers and wolf’s blood in my veins.
I lived upon the heights inhaling the odors of views:
meadows in sunlight, spruces after rain,
and clumps of earth beneath the snow.

I had a decent home and people on call,
I was fed, washed, groomed,
and taken for lovely strolls.
Respectfully, though, and comme il faut.
They all knew full well whose dog I was.

Any lousy mutt can have a master.
Take care, though—beware comparisons.
My master was a breed apart.
He had a splendid herd that trailed his every step
and fixed its eyes on him in fearful awe.

For me they always had smiles,
with envy poorly hidden.
Since only I had the right
to greet him with nimble leaps,
only I could say good-bye by worrying his trousers with my teeth.
Only I was permitted
to receive scratching and stroking
with my head laid in his lap.
Only I could feign sleep
while he bent over me to whisper something.

He raged at others often, loudly.
He snarled, barked,
raced from wall to wall.
I suspect he liked only me
and nobody else, ever.

I also had responsibilities: waiting, trusting.
Since he would turn up briefly and then vanish.
What kept him down there in the lowlands, I don’t know.
I guessed, though, it must be pressing business,
at least as pressing
as my battle with the cats.
and everything that moves for no good reason. 
There’s fate and fate. Mine changed abruptly. 
One spring came
and he wasn’t there. 
All hell broke loose at home.
Suitcases, chests, trunks crammed into cars. 
The wheels squealed tearing downhill
and fell silent round the end.

On the terrace scraps and tatters flamed,
yellow shirts, armbands with black emblems
and lots and lots of battered cartons
with little banners tumbling out.

I tossed and turned in this whirlwind,
more amazed than peeved.
I felt unfriendly glances on my fur.
As if I were a dog without a master,
some pushy stray
chased downstairs with a broom.

Someone tore my silver-trimmed collar off,
someone kicked my bowl, empty for days.
Then someone else, driving away,
leaned out from the car
and shot me twice.
He couldn’t even shoot straight,
since I died for a long time, in pain,
to the buzz of impertinent flies.
I, the dog of my master.
Here They Are the Words

by Mahmoud Darwish, tr. from the Arabic by Fady Joudah

Here they are the words fluttering in the mind
There’s a land in the mind with a heavenly name the words carry.
And the dead don’t dream much, yet if they do
no one believes their dreams.
Here they are the words fluttering in my body
bee by bee…and if I write the blue upon the blue
the songs would turn green, and life would return to me.
With words I found the road to the name
shorter…poets are not often happy, and when they are, no one believes them…
I said: I am still alive because I see the words
fluttering in the mind.
There’s a song in the mind swinging between presence
and absence, it opens the door only
to shut the door…a song about
the life of fog, it obeys only what
I forgot of the words!
The Man Who Kept Nightingales

by Marie Howe

His friend said something like, Let him go, he’s done nothing.
--that’s what the newspapers said.
And the nightingales sang as the car doors slammed slam slam, slam.

Do you want us to blow your brains out too? is what he said they said.
What did the man, who kept nightingales, say?
What did the dirt road say?
What comment from the bushes and plants and insects nearby?
And the rope? And the power tool?

The man’s body, dumped by the sewage treatment plant, is speechless.
And the nightingales. What is the sound of that song?
I’m an American, I have never heard a nightingale sing,
although all the poems say the song of that bird is sublime.
Dulce et Decorum Est
by Wilfred Owen

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of tired, outstripped Five-Nines that dropped behind.

Gas! Gas! Quick, boys!—An ecstasy of fumbling,
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime...
Dim, through the misty panes and thick green light,
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.

In all my dreams, before my helpless sight,
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.

If in some smothering dreams you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori.
Try To Praise the Mutilated World

by Adam Zagajewski, translated from the Polish by Clare Cavanagh

Try to praise the mutilated world.
Remember June’s long days,
and wild strawberries, drops of rosé wine.
The nettles that methodically overgrow
the abandoned homesteads of exiles.
You must praise the mutilated world.
You watched the stylish yachts and ships;
one of them had a long trip ahead of it,
while salty oblivion awaited others.
You’ve seen the refugees going nowhere,
you’ve heard the executioners sing joyfully.
You should praise the mutilated world.
Remember the moments when we were together
in a white room and the curtain fluttered.
Return in thought to the concert where music flared.
You gathered acorns in the park in autumn
and leaves eddied over the earth’s scars.
Praise the mutilated world
and the gray feather a thrush lost,
and the gentle light that strays and vanishes
and returns.
Works Cited


